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Pursuing Peace and Security in the Middle East

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Following is a statement by Nicholas A. Veliotes, Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, before the Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, October 21, 1981.

I welcome the opportunity to come before you to discuss U.S. policy toward the Middle East and Persian Gulf area. In recent years, my predecessors and other State Department representatives have come before this subcommittee in testimony emphasizing the importance of events in the Middle East to a range of critical U.S. national interests. There is no question that the persistent and successful pursuit of comprehensive and balanced U.S. policy in the Middle East and Persian Gulf is critical:

- To our national security through the preservation of a global strategic balance which will permit free and independent societies to pursue their aspirations;
- To checking the spread of Soviet influence in this strategic region and, by extension, elsewhere in the world;
- To fulfilling effectively the inescapable responsibility of the United States to work for the resolution of conflicts in the region which threaten international security and the well-being of countries and peoples of the region;
- To assuring the security and welfare of the State of Israel and of other important friendly nations in the region;
- To preserving and fostering our critical interests in access to the region's oil; and
- To supporting other major economic interests, including: access to markets for American goods and services, cooperation with the wealthier states in the region to maintain a sound international financial order, and assisting the orderly economic development of the region.

The Search for Peace

While the Middle East and Persian Gulf region poses many complexities and many challenges for our foreign policy and our national security policy—and our responses to a variety of tensions, crises, and opportunities must be varied yet internally consistent—there are two central themes of our policy approach. We seek peace and we seek security for the region, both to promote our own policy and to permit all its peoples to pursue their welfare. In this context:

- We are pursuing a just and comprehensive Middle East peace vigorously and with determination. We will do so within the framework of the Camp David agreements which, in turn, derive their validity from U.N. Security Council Resolution 242. In recent months, we have made significant progress in the furtherance of that process through successful negotiation with Egypt and Israel of the arrangements for final

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Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai in April 1982. We are completing arrangements for the multinational force of observers which will be a key factor in the implementation of that agreement. We are confident that both Israel and Egypt are firmly set on the course of full implementation of their treaty of peace.

• We have at the same time resumed trilateral negotiations with Egypt and Israel on the establishment of the autonomy regime for the West Bank and Gaza. These initial meetings in this phase of the autonomy negotiations have moved forward in a cordial and business-like spirit. And we are now moving to intensify and accelerate these negotiations, looking to early achievement of an agreement which will offer the basis for the Palestinian participation that is necessary for successful conclusion of an arrangement permitting the establishment of a transitional regime in the West Bank/Gaza. We regard it as important that we be able to demonstrate in the near future the tangible results of this process to those who have opposed or doubted its effectiveness.

• We will continue to be engaged in efforts to support the Government and people of Lebanon, to resolve Lebanon's problems, and to move toward national reconciliation and greater security. Lebanon remains a potential flashpoint in the region, and we are working vigorously to consolidate the fragile cease-fire arranged by Ambassador Habib [the President's special emissary to the Middle East] last July and to support the Bayt-ad-Din process aimed at improving the internal situation. We attach particular importance to this Arab-sponsored process which offers the best prospect for creating conditions for a phased, orderly withdrawal of Syrian forces to begin. We will be giving consideration to a further visit to the region by Ambassador Habib in the context of his continuing mission for the President.

• We will continue to support the resolution of the war between Iran and Iraq by negotiation and in a manner consistent with the principles of international law, including nonintervention in internal affairs of another state, support for the territorial integrity of both combatants, and freedom of navigation. We have been and will remain impartial in this conflict in an effort to underline the importance we attach to the independence and security of the states of the gulf and the interest of the international community in mutual respect and balance in relationships among them.

As we intensify our efforts to move the Middle East peace process forward, we recognize that the parties directly concerned and the other Middle East nations with a profound interest in this critical issue face difficult decisions. A spirit of accommodation will be essential if peace is to be achieved. It is clear that these difficult decisions can be more easily taken if the states concerned feel secure and confident in U.S. support for their security.

Regional Security

From its first days in office, this Administration has moved forward vigorously in pursuit of the second main thrust of our Middle East/Persian Gulf policy, bolstering the security of the region. We fully share with friendly states in the region the concern about the threats to security posed by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the chaos in Iran, the Soviet position in the Horn of Africa, Libyan pressures against neighboring states, and the recent tripartite alliance of Libya, South Yemen, and Ethiopia. We have taken steps to build the confidence of key states in our commitment to their security from Soviet and Soviet-supported external threats and from Soviet exploitation of conflict and instability.

At a time of budget stringencies, we have, with considerable sacrifice, increased the national resources for our own military to accelerate the development of their capability to better deter threats to the region and to respond to contingencies in which friendly states in the Middle East and the gulf might need and request our help. We have increased our military deployments to the region. We have at the same time significantly increased our security assistance to friendly strategic states in the region to better enable them to provide for their own defense and resist external pressures.

We have taken decisions to provide military equipment which we believe necessary to develop adequately the defense capability of key critical states. We have continued our significant security relationship with Israel. We have increased the flow of U.S. military equipment and training to Egypt. In the context of a longstanding security assistance relationship and a critical U.S. interest in the security of gulf oil fields, we have proposed to the Congress the sale of air defense enhancement equipment, including AWACS [airborne warning and control system], to Saudi Arabia. We have carried forward and, to the extent possible with available resources, intensified our military supply relationships with Morocco and Tunisia, with Jordan and with the states on the Arab side of the Persian Gulf. We will continue to be engaged with an attentive to the concerns and priority needs of these friends.

We believe we have strengthened the perception among friendly states in the region that the United States is dedicated to the area's security. We are and will be a strong and reliable partner. As we move forward to improve the security environment in the region and to build our security cooperation with key states there, we recognize that sound and sustained progress toward Middle East peace is essential if our strategy of enhancing the region's security is to be fully and effectively achieved, if the opportunities for stimulating instability and exploiting grievances are to be reduced and eliminated. Indeed, central to this Administration's approach to the Middle East is the recognition that progress toward Middle East peace and progress in building regional security are inextricably interrelated and mutually reinforcing.

Nowhere is this shown more clearly than in our relationship with Israel. We are earnestly seeking, through the peace process set in train by the historic agreements reached at Camp David, to achieve a situation in the hopefully not-far-distant future whereby Israel will finally be able to live at peace with all its neighbors. At the same time, we are committed to the security of Israel and, to the extent that we are able to demonstrate that fact, Israel will feel more secure in making the accommodations necessary to any successful negotiation. Beyond that, during Prime Minister Begin's recent visit we were able to begin a process of discussions to identify areas in which we and Israel

may act in concert, recognizing certain political constraints, to enhance our strategic posture in meeting external threats to the area. I would like to emphasize the President's remarks in receiving Prime Minister Begin when he said: "As we consult . . . rest assured that the security of Israel is a principal objective of this Administration and that we regard Israel as an ally in our search for regional stability."

Just as the security and welfare of Israel are key to our pursuit of peace and security in the region, the strength and confidence of Egypt are central to the attainment of our priority objectives in the Middle East. In the wake of the tragic assassination of President Sadat, we are confident that Egypt under President Mubarak is moving forward in order and continuity and calm and confidence to pursue Egypt's key and constructive role in the region. We have manifested in word and deed our confidence in and support for the new Egyptian leadership. We are sensitive to Egypt's concerns about the threats which it and its neighbors face from Libya and are determined to be supportive of Egypt's measured response to this challenge. We are confident that our security cooperation with Egypt will proceed apace in the interest of improving the strategic environment for the entire region. We are confident that Egypt will proceed with us and with Israel in a determined pursuit through the Camp David framework of a comprehensive and durable Middle East peace.

Our policy will continue to reflect the important economic element in our relationship with the area, which:

- Is a critical source of oil for our country and for our allies;
- Is an increasingly important market for American goods and services;
- Contains wealthy oil-exporting nations that have become an important force in international finance; and
- Contains strategically important but economically weak countries whose orderly development is critical to the stability of the region.

We are determined to work closely with those Middle East oil exporters who perceive with us a common responsibility of consumers and producers to maintain orderly oil markets. We will continue to promote the transfer of American technology and the sale of U.S. goods and services to build on the already strong base of economic cooperation between the United States and the Middle East. Through our bilateral economic assistance programs and through our participation in international lending institutions, we remain committed to devoting a very substantial portion of our worldwide economic assistance to help key countries in and bordering on this area—Israel, Egypt, India, Pakistan, Sudan, and Turkey—to strengthen their economies and provide a better economic life for their peoples. We intend to continue working closely with wealthy states in the area in our effort to assist the needier countries of the region as well as working with these wealthy states in the broader task of strengthening the international financial order. ■

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